



The Medieval Hungarian and Other Frontiers

At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, C. 1000-C. 1300 by Nora Berend

Review by: Martyn Rady

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Review Article

The Medieval Hungarian and Other Frontiers

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MEDIEVAL Hungary's relative underpopulation, the readiness of its rulers to invite and reward foreign warriors and settlers, and its own geographical location at the end of the 'steppe corridor' made the kingdom a *Gastland* and a place where different peoples, cultures and confessions met. Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century chroniclers listed the foreigners who had previously arrived in Hungary: 'Czechs, Poles, Greeks, Spaniards, Ishmaelites or Saracens, Pechenegs, Armenians, Saxons, Thuringians, men of Meissen, Rhinelanders, Cumans', and indeed, 'people of almost every foreign nation upon earth'.¹ But Hungary was also a bulwark and Christendom's first line of defence against invaders from the east, not a few of which might be identified as the allies of groups previously welcomed into the kingdom. Nora Berend's *At the Gateway of Christendom* examines three groups of *hospites* in Hungary whose religion, affiliations and practices marked them out as both exceptional and even potentially dangerous: Jews, Muslims and Cuman nomads. Her account, although limited to the period of the Árpád kings (1000–1301), is the most thorough in any language. Berend not only exhaustively reviews the scholarly literature on these three groups but also revisits many old and familiar documents, exposing forgeries and misreadings. Her account does not, moreover, eschew a larger, more conceptual framework. The one Berend embraces is that of 'the frontier', to the historiography of which she dedicates the first, introductory chapter of her book and to which she

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¹ Imre Szentpétery, *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, 2 vols, Budapest, 1937, 1, p. 303; Simon of Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, edited by László Veszprémy and Frank Schaer, Budapest and New York, 1999, p. 175.

often subsequently appeals for explanation. It is within the context of the frontier and of the enormous literature on 'frontier studies' that Berend examines both Hungary's role as a *Gastland* and the shifts which royal policy took in respect of this condition. Berend writes,

The fact that Hungary continued on the frontier of Christendom throughout the Middle Ages meant that the kingdom was both accustomed to an influx of immigrants of all kinds from east and west and was geared to defend itself (and Christendom) against intruders . . . But the country also continued to incorporate new settlers; it remained a 'guest-land', a meeting point of cultures and religions. As Béla IV [1235–70] had characterized it, Hungary was a gate that could give or restrict access. (p. 270).

The 'Frontier Thesis': Turner and Berend

Most historical theses have a currency of about two decades. Thereafter, they move into a half-life, the principal areas of debate exhausted but seldom resolved. In contrast to these, Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of the frontier continues to demonstrate a quite remarkable vitality. Turner first explained his thesis in 1893 in a lecture given to an audience of the American Historical Association. During the course of the lecture, several members of the audience slept and none asked any questions at its close. Turner's thesis of the frontier continues, nevertheless, to excite conference-papers, collections of essays and even monographs. Transplanted from its original home on the plains of Wisconsin, the frontier thesis has been variously used to explain the dynamics of medieval and early modern European history, as well as aspects of Turkish, Asian and colonial history. It still, moreover, retains a powerful influence on all studies of American continental expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Turner's thesis should in the first instance be considered an example of national mythopeia, intended to explain the singularity and exceptionalism of, in this case, the American nation. According to Turner, the westward expansion across the frontier 'wilderness' not only acted as a safety valve for overpopulation in the eastern states but also helped define a new type of national character. The experience of the frontier, Turner explained, rebounded back into the American interior, fostering individualism and self-reliance, and promoting in its turn popular democratic institutions. In this way, Turner constructed a new narrative of American history which consciously repudiated America's European inheritance in favour of the experience of its own pioneers and backwoodsmen.

The continental span of Turner's thesis lent it sufficient scope to accommodate other 'broad brush' approaches to national history and imperial expansion, not a few of which (most notably by James Westfall Thompson and Paul Wittek) self-consciously adopted Turner's vision

and vocabulary. Following the collapse of empires, however, the frontier thesis was comprehensively transformed. Turner's descriptions of life on the frontier were thus re-examined (they had, after all, paid little heed to native Americans) and brought into line with the new fashion for multi-culturalism and 'cultural equivalence'. The frontier accordingly ceased to be understood as a wilderness ready for taming and became instead a place of exchange, tolerance, and *convivencia*. Recent surveys have demonstrated the cultural contradictions of life on the frontier — how intense social exchange may operate even amidst conditions of extreme mutual antagonism. Paradoxically, however, the frontier of today's historians is not only post-modern in its ambiguities but also influenced by the 'new realism' of current discourse in international relations. For many historians writing in the 1990s and after (and Nora Berend is no exception), the frontier constitutes a fault-line between clashing civilizations. For Berend, thus, Hungary's predicament was that it lay at the meeting-place of three civilizations: Catholic Christendom, Byzantium, and the pagan empires of the eastern nomads (p. 41).

A less exacting critic might conclude that part of Turner's appeal is his early use of quantitative methods and his precocious interest in human geography, micro- and macro-historical approaches, and the history of mentalités. For Berend, however, Turner's continued influence lies in that he provided 'not a coherent thesis, and the very fact of its opacity lent it its force'.² Berend is rightly aware that too many of the supposedly distinguishing features of the frontier turn out, upon closer inspection, to be typical of medieval European development as a whole. Following Archibald Lewis, it might on this basis be possible to conclude that medieval Europe constituted in its entirety a frontier region.³ But as Berend observes, such an assertion denies the frontier its singularity and thus renders it otiose as an interpretative tool. As she concludes elsewhere, 'It explains nothing to call the whole of medieval Europe a frontier society'.⁴ After reviewing the historical literature, Berend writes: 'The frontier can be a place, a fringe or outer boundary; a type of society or movement; and a process. In fact, other words could often be substituted for "frontier" depending on the context: conquest and colonization, land reclamation, a variety of cultural processes' (p. 15).

² Nora Berend, 'Medievalists and the Notion of the Frontier', *The Medieval History Journal* (New Delhi), 2, 1999, pp. 55–72 (hereafter, Berend), (p. 56).

³ Archibald Lewis, 'The Closing of the Mediaeval Frontier 1250–1350', *Speculum*, 33, 1958, pp. 475–83.

⁴ Berend, p. 67.

Jews, Muslims and Cumans on the Frontier

Berend argues that Hungary's location on the frontier of Christendom combined with the terms of its early settlement to make the kingdom particularly receptive to immigrant groups. Notwithstanding the ninth-century conquest, Hungary was not formed as a kingdom by Christians overcoming a population of non-believers. The context in which the non-Christian population moved 'was thus radically different from that in most other areas along the frontiers of Christendom' (p. 41). Hungary was, moreover, used to welcoming foreigners, whether as knights, craftsmen, farmers or townsfolk. The newcomers were frequently granted their own special rights as *hospites* and allowed as far as possible their own judicial organization and customs. Hungarian society was thus 'cellular . . . with a diversity of groups having their own duties and privileges' (p. 107). Such a circumstance facilitated the inclusion of peoples who not only followed different religions but also lived by their own rules of conduct and had a quite separate economic and social organization. Árpád Hungary may not have been by modern standards a particularly tolerant society but its structure tended towards accommodation. As Berend additionally observes, the movement of peoples from the east to the west and their ultimate settlement in Hungary, must qualify the notion of a continually expanding European frontier as recently advanced by Robert Bartlett.⁵ Berend explains, 'There was a fluidity at the borders of Europe; not only could conquerors from the core push further outwards, but non-Christians and non-Europeans were also able to penetrate Europe and become integrated into frontier areas' (p. 271).

Berend's analysis is supported by a wide range of sources, some of which have been notoriously neglected. Her study of Hungarian Jewry thus relies in places on the *responsa* given by foreign rabbis to problems of conduct emerging out of Hungarian Jewish communities. The most important documents are, additionally, subjected to close and detailed criticism. Berend convincingly demonstrates that Béla IV's 1251 charter of Jewish privileges was not, as previously thought, a straightforward copy of Frederick of Austria's charter of 1244. It was instead rewritten to reflect local conditions and in many respects ameliorated Frederick's earlier regulations. She disputes the idea that Jews constituted *servi camerae* (*Kammerknechten*) and indicates that while Jews were disproportionately employed in the treasury and minting organization, they were still outnumbered there by Christians. Berend confirms the role played by Jews in leasing revenues and in money-lending. In respect of these functions, it seems to the present reviewer that they

⁵ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350*, London, 1993.

were doubtless facilitated by (and may even have their origin in) the terms according to which Jews held property in the kingdom. Because they owned land personally, and were not bound by collective ownership rights and restrictions on alienation, Jews were able to raise money through the liquidation of property more easily than their Christian counterparts.

Whereas Jews constituted a predominantly urban population, Muslims mainly settled in the countryside. Although they were also active in the royal financial administration, Muslims principally discharged a military role and had a reputation as excellent archers. Hungary's Muslim community maintained some contact with its co-religionists elsewhere. There were Hungarian Muslims studying in Aleppo in the early thirteenth century, who reported that their knowledge would be honoured in their home community. In 1217, a Hungarian crusader was released from captivity in the Holy Land with the assistance of 'Hungarian Saracens' studying in Jerusalem (pp. 96, 240). Hungary's Muslim population stood at around 2,000–5,000, and was thus probably a little larger than the Jewish. Nevertheless, it was, as Berend argues, insufficiently numerous to prosper. It lacked, moreover, a supporting network of co-religionists living in neighbouring countries, and may have been hard hit by the Mongol invasion and occupation of 1241–42. By the end of the thirteenth century, Islam was no longer practised anywhere in the Hungarian kingdom.

The Cumans settled in Hungary in several waves during the first half of the thirteenth century. They were of advantage to the Hungarian kings since they supplied a ready reserve of light horsemen, thus making up for the declining military role of Sekels (Székely-ek), Pechenegs and Muslims. The Cumans were moved into dispersed settlements and were as *hospites* given their own privileges. In a thorough analysis, Berend conclusively proves, however, that the so-called 'Cuman privilege' of 10 August 1279 is — as has been long suspected — an eighteenth-century forgery. To begin with, the Cumans occupied an ambiguous position in the medieval kingdom. They were nomads who followed their own tribal customs and rituals and regularly trespassed on agricultural estates, but by the thirteenth century the Hungarians were themselves extolling their own nomadic ancestry and descent from Attila's Huns. The Cumans were useful auxiliaries in warfare, but their large number — amounting to seven or eight per cent of the entire population of the kingdom — made them particularly intimidating. During the last decades of the thirteenth century, the Cumans became the subject of forcible conversion, and they gradually abandoned nomadism in favour of a more settled way of life. By reference to burial patterns, Berend suggests that the Cumans' espousal of Christianity was slow to take effect. Except for the upper élite, which

was rapidly Christianized and Magyarized, conversion was 'partial and permanent' (p. 253). Berend additionally points out that the evidence for Ladislas IV ('the Cuman') embracing paganism is slender, and almost certainly a piece of political propaganda. Although Ladislas may have adopted a more autocratic manner of rule,⁶ this was hardly likely to have its origin in the consensual governmental methods of the steppe nomads.

The kings of Hungary were initially complaisant with regard to the Cumans' pagan practices, on account of which they regularly received rebuke from Rome. The replies of Béla IV to papal criticism are in this respect telling, and Berend makes much of them. Béla, according to Berend, expounded in his defence a 'rhetoric of the frontier' in the course of which the king explained that he was driven by necessity to consort with pagans and that he did so for the benefit of Christendom. As Béla wrote, 'For the good of Christendom . . . we defend our kingdom today by pagans, humiliating our royal majesty, and we tread the enemies of the church underfoot with the aid of pagans' (p. 167). Elsewhere, Béla explained that Hungary stood 'at the gate of Christendom' and that should the Mongols possess it then other regions of the Catholic faith would be swiftly exposed to assault. The kingdom's fragility and possible detachment meant that desperate and even shameful remedies had therefore to be embraced. As Berend observes, 'This ideology culminated in the concept of Hungary (just like Poland and other countries on the eastern frontier) as the "bulwark of Christendom" during the Ottoman wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' (p. 270).⁷

The forcible Cuman conversion undertaken in the late thirteenth century was a prelude to the harsher measures taken against the kingdom's Jews in the next. As the multi-cellular character of Hungarian society gave way to the *Ständestaat* of the nobility so, Berend explains, there was less room in which distinctive groups could operate:

Non-Christian legal status was not a unique category. It seems that as long as Hungarian society remained 'cellular', that is, while a multitude of small corporate groups made up the fabric of society, non-Christians were not separated by their legal status from the rest of society. As the social structure crystallized into more homogeneous strata of nobles and peasants, the status of non-Christians became distinctive. (p. 269)

⁶ As in Ladislas IV's famous challenge to the Archbishop of Esztergom, 'I am the law over myself and I will not suffer to be confined by the laws of some priests' (p. 176).

⁷ More exact comparisons may be found in respect of Lusignan Cyprus and Hospitaller Rhodes. See Norman Housley, 'Frontier Societies and Crusading in the Late Middle Ages', in Benjamin Arbel (ed.), *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, London and Portland, OR, 1996, pp. 104–19 (p. 108).

Berend's observation applies equally well to the class of Hungarian freemen or the many warriors holding conditional tenures, all of whose status suffered considerable erosion after the thirteenth century.

It is often the case, as Berend observes, that historians attribute to the frontier characteristics that are in fact common features of European society as a whole (p. 15).⁸ Berend is, however, partly guilty herself of the same misattribution of peculiarities. Certainly, medieval Hungary was multi-cellular in respect of its social and legal organization, but so was almost every other medieval kingdom. In this respect, the notion of the privileged community is by no means a feature solely of frontier societies. Again, in many parts of Europe the treatment of Jews differed little from Hungary. If Hungary's pogroms came later, this almost certainly should be explained by the kingdom's relative insulation from the crusading ideology of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. In Spain, whose *reconquista* is surely the reverse of the pattern of Christian settlement in Hungary described by Berend, Jews retained positions in the royal financial and administrative apparatus, and co-existed with Catholics in an atmosphere of mutual forbearance until well into the fourteenth century.⁹ Finally, Berend's more general observations with regard to the construction and ambiguity of identity that made Jews, Muslims and nomads into 'established outsiders' in Hungary, are hardly specific to the frontier. They are instead, as her adaptation of Norbert Elias's terminology suggests (p. 272), part of everyday interaction and have little to do with the dynamics of location.

The frontier and 'militarization': Hungary, Spain and Ukraine

If the frontier is to remain a valid explanatory term then its singularity has to be established. Specific conditions and institutions need to be attached to it, which are either unique to, or particularly intense in, frontier regions. For historians of medieval Hungary, the early Árpád *gyepű* of barricades, wastelands, watch towers and gateways has often functioned as the most distinctive of frontiers. It is, however, generally accepted that medieval frontiers constituted zones of varying depth between different and often antagonistic political units. The immediate hinterland was usually (although not always — as for instance the border between France and the Empire before the sixteenth century demonstrates) considered to be of military importance and was accordingly either fortified or formed a critical part of a larger defensive

⁸ See also, Peter Lineham, 'Segovia: A "Frontier" Diocese in the Thirteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, 96, 1981, pp. 481–508 (pp. 502–03).

⁹ Benjamin R. Gampely, 'Jews, Christians and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: *Convivencia* through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews', in V. B. Mann, T. F. Glick, J. D. Dodds (eds), *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain*, New York, 1992, pp. 11–37 (pp. 21–25).

organization. As Berend explains in respect of Hungary (although her argument is hedged around by all sorts of caveats), 'Hungary was on the frontier of Christendom; its own frontiers were permeable to both hostile and peaceful interaction from east and west. Defence and military considerations were important and at times the main task of kings' (p. 30). Similar explanations have been applied to the history of medieval Spain.¹⁰ Given these circumstances, one might expect frontier regions to display a high degree of militarization, and for military obligations to be firmly located and specified. In neither Hungary nor Spain, however, both of which kingdoms existed on a precarious and contested 'fault-line' between civilizations, can this be at all demonstrated.

Let us take Hungary first. In medieval Hungary, the obligations of the estate of nobility were never expressly laid. Its members received land from the ruler in reward for, and in expectation of, personal service. This service was, however, dictated by custom and was not defined with any precision. As it turned out, many nobles avoided military service altogether or, when they did attend the royal summons, did so 'more on crutches than with arms, more like beggars than warriors'.¹¹ Even on the frontier of the kingdom and thus in the area most open to assault, both royal and private grants of land to noblemen did not carry with them the duty to perform any special services. Certainly, semi-nobles might be stationed at various strategic parts of the kingdom and given land in exchange for defined duties. With the possible exception of the Banat, their number was, however, pitifully small and continually diminished by the recruitment of individual members into the class of 'full nobles'. Despite the assaults of Mongols, Turks and Tatars, medieval Hungary had no *Grenzer* organization. Nor did Hungary adopt, even on paper, a hierarchical system of mutually interlocking obligations through which the needs of government could be met. Even thus on the frontier of a frontier-kingdom, no particular form of organization can be detected corresponding to what appear to be the obvious and pressing military needs of the moment.¹²

The same circumstance applies to medieval Spain, or, more particularly, the kingdom of Asturias-León. Indeed, the terms by which Spanish noblemen held land and discharged their obligations were virtually identical to those of their Hungarian counterparts — a

¹⁰ Elena Lourie, 'A Society organized for war: Medieval Spain', *Past and Present*, 35, 1966, pp. 54–76.

¹¹ *Decreta Regni Mediaevalis Hungariae. The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, edited by János M. Bak, Pál Engel, James Ross Sweeney, vol. 2, Salt Lake City, UH, 1992, p. 141 (Propositions of c. 1432/1433: art 2).

¹² Martyn Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*, Basingstoke and New York, 2000 (hereafter, Rady), pp. 28–38, 79–95, 144–57.

circumstance which must severely compromise all attempts to establish the Visigothic and Frankish foundations of Spanish 'feudalism'.¹³ Like his Hungarian counterpart, the Spanish nobleman acquired his status from service in the royal retinue. He became thereby a *fidelis* and might in time be given a piece of landed property, a *prestimonio*, which was ceded to him *pro bono et fideli servitio*.¹⁴ In return for this gift, the nobleman was expected to serve his royal master, and indeed to be spurred on to further endeavour.¹⁵ As in Hungary, lengthy *narrationes* in charters of donation spelled out individual services performed and enumerated the largesse that followed conspicuous deeds of valour.¹⁶ Similar conditions of service accompanied the numerous grants of land by royal *fideles*, churchmen and urban corporations to their own men. Whether a royal or private grant, the land conveyed was most usually bestowed either in perpetuity or for the lifetime of the recipient (although these had a tendency to become hereditary anyway).¹⁷ On occasions, the grant of land was accompanied by an act of *hominium* or vassalage. This, however, carried little religious symbolism, but bore instead all the hallmarks of a contract of conveyance — it was often indeed performed by intermediaries.¹⁸

The duties of the vassal were seldom laid, but, as in Hungary, were comprehended by custom. The vassal was most commonly enjoined to service, but this was not specified in any detail. Occasionally, the vassal committed himself to serve his master in peace and war (*hacer guerra y paz*), or to undertake *anudba* or vigilance against the enemy. Very occasionally, a spot that particularly needed defending was identified.¹⁹ In the majority of cases, however, no particular services were listed. Frontier warriors were thus simply expected to undertake those same duties as warriors performed elsewhere (*sicut totos infanzones faciebant*).²⁰ Vassals were, moreover, seldom stable in their allegiance but from an early period tended to switch loyalties between lords. The bond between lord and vassal persevered only for as long as it suited both parties, although upon showing any infidelity to his lord the vassal might (as in Hungary) be expected to return the land he had been given.²¹ As the rewards of service changed from grants of land to cash

¹³ Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *El Torno a los Orígenes del Feudalismo*, I-II/3, Mendoza, 1942, I/1, pp. 13–17; *ibid.*, II/3, pp. 260–62; Hilda Grassotti, *Las Instituciones feudo-vasalláticas en León y Castilla*, 2 vols, Spoleto, 1969 (hereafter, Grassotti, *Las Instituciones feudo-vasalláticas*), I, pp. 25–29 (I am fully aware that Catalonia may be different).

¹⁴ Grassotti, *Las Instituciones feudo-vasalláticas*, I, p. 444.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 501.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 548–49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 629.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 137–38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 603, 632, 696, 719.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 607.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 439–51; *ibid.*, II, pp. 650–52; Rady, pp. 123–25.

payments or rights to revenue, so the bond between lord and vassal became increasingly unstable, leading to the virtual collapse of the entire system of vassalage and service in the fourteenth century.²²

The obligations of the Spanish nobleman were not vested in the land which he held but in the personal commitment to service which linked him to his lord or to the king. When either of these died, the nobleman was therefore expected to renew his commitment to service.²³ Unlike in Hungary, however, where the possession of land was the mark of true nobility, in Spain descent from a warrior whose deeds had prompted his ennoblement counted for more.²⁴ Despite this difference, noble service in both Hungary and Spain almost certainly had its origins in the period when warriors fought beside the king in the royal retinue. In return for their fidelity, they received badges of the king's pleasure in the form of titles, property or other favours. The relationship between king and man was not meanly contractual, but based on love, trust and mutual commitment. With the expansion of the kingdom and of royal authority, this conception of personal service was transferred from the royal retinue to the military organization of the frontier. No transformation of undertakings took place, however, as a part of this transferral even though the royal servant now performed his duties at a distance from his master. Instead the methods of the royal household were exported and extended with little alteration, and relations accordingly remained personal and not grounded on express obligations. In terms of military institutions and organization, the Hungarian and Spanish frontiers were thus largely indistinguishable from their respective societies.

The specification of military obligations and their location in the land occurred over a prolonged period in only a few frontier regions. Pre-eminent among these was Red Ruthenia in western Ukraine — one of the few places in medieval Europe at all approximating to the classic *commendatio-beneficium* model of feudal relations. In Red Ruthenia, grants of land by the Polish king to his *fideles* were frequently accompanied by firm military commitments arising *ratione donationis*. These listed the number and quality of troops which the recipient was expected to bring into the royal service — *ad quamlibet expeditionem cum una lancea et tribus sagittariis . . . tenebuntur servire et sint asstricti, tempore expeditionum una balista seu arcu tenetur famulari*, and so on.²⁵ They might

²² Grassotti, *Las Instituciones feudo-vasalláticas*, II, pp. 686–90.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 672.

²⁴ Spanish nobles thus customarily held titles which drew attention to their descent, whereas the titles of Hungarian nobles advertised the holder's premier landed estates.

²⁵ *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie z czasów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Archiwum tak zwanego Bernardynskiego we Lwowie*, 25 vols, Lwów, 1868–1935 (hereafter, *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie*), III, pp. 112, 163–64.

also specify that the nobleman was expected to reside on the estate given him.²⁶ Large tracts of land were alienated in this way by the ruler to senior lords, with the consequence that the free gentry living in these territories were squeezed into a condition of clientage holding their own properties henceforward on defined terms and in return for specified military services. The award of local posts, most notably the office of village headman (*Schultheiss*, *soltýs*), which might have additional conditions of service laid on it, often strengthened relations between lord and client.²⁷ Nevertheless, the hierarchical organization of property-relationships, vassalage and military service proved hard to maintain even in Red Ruthenia. Clients regularly sought to convert their tenements back into freeholds or sold on the offices given to them.²⁸ Additionally, the sale or pledge of estates seems not have been accompanied by the transfer to the alienee of the military commitments attaching to the property. At least, the many tens of thousands of charters and records of transactions published by territorial courts in the fifteenth century, while often enumerating in some detail the obligations of villagers and other servile groups, do not mention the duties attendant upon the purchasers of property.²⁹

The example of Red Ruthenia highlights by its exceptionalism the condition of the Hungarian and Spanish frontiers. In both these cases, we may talk of the frontier being almost from its very inception institutionally 'closed'. Although advancing as a zone of settlement and conquest, the frontier lacked institutional singularity. Instead, institutions that had already been developed in the interior were transplanted to the frontier with very little modification. The frontier is, however, a slippery concept and can mean many things. What is, however, emphatically needed in the context of the Middle Ages are demonstrations that the frontier was either qualitatively different from the larger society or that such differences of degree as existed were sufficiently pronounced as to amount to the same. The brief survey given above of

²⁶ *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie*, iv, pp. 59, 146; *ibid.*, v, p. 14.

²⁷ Janusz Kurtyka, 'Enfeoffment and Clientship in Late Medieval Poland', unpublished conference paper, Central European University, Budapest, November 1998; *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie*, iii, pp. 13, 168.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 13; *ibid.*, v, p. 91; *ibid.*, x, p. 25;

²⁹ *Ibid.*, iv, pp. 20–21, 75–82; *ibid.*, x, pp. 9, 12, 16, 28, 38, 56, 58, 65, 82; *ibid.*, xii, pp. 20–21, 296, 302, 305, 307–08, 311, 316, 319; *ibid.*, xiii, pp. 330–31, etc. Some Polish historians have suggested that the introduction of 'feudal' relations among the Galician nobility was the consequence of Hungarian rule in the 1370s and 1380s. The specification of obligations laid on noble land predates, however, the Hungarian period — *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie*, ii, pp. 3–24; *ibid.*, iii, pp. 5, 23–24. Moreover, the subinfeudation of property was infrequent in Hungarian noble society since the mark of true nobility was to hold land directly of the ruler.

some Hungarian, Spanish and Ruthenian institutions suggests, however, that historians may still have some way to go in justifying the explanatory terms they use.

Conclusion

Berend's book covers so much ground and explores it so thoroughly that it would be wrong to fault her for use of an organizing principle with which, in any case, she seems less than always happy. Certainly, her book could have been written without any reference to frontiers or frontier ideology. Nevertheless, as Patricia Limerick has observed, this type of criticism may well be missing the point. Limerick writes, 'it may not matter a great deal whether these scholars [of the frontier in history] call their territory "conquest studies", "colonization studies", "expansion-of-the-world-market studies" or "frontier studies"'. In spirit and style, frontier history has become much more dynamic and inclusive, and that fact outweighs the problem of terminology'.³⁰

In short, this is a remarkable book which manages at the same time to be both thorough and provocative. By putting medieval Hungarian history and the story of its most prominent 'outsiders' in the context of the frontier, Berend certainly took a risk. But it has paid off, making her contribution to the study of early medieval Hungary all the more stimulating and all the more relevant to a larger scholarly audience.

³⁰ Patricia Nelson Limerick, 'The adventures of the frontier in the twentieth century', in James R. Grossman (ed.), *The Frontier in American Culture*, Berkeley, CA, and London, 1994, pp. 67–102 (p. 78).